

The Academy of the Sword

ILLUSTRATED FENCING BOOKS 1500-1800



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Donald J. LaRocca



THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, NEW YORK

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Introduction

The Academy of the Sword centers on an assemblage of rare illustrated books devoted to the subject of fencing and dueling, drawn (with one exception) from the library of the Arms and Armor Department of The Metropolitan Museum of Art. The title is taken from Girard Thibault's *Académie de l'Épée* (Leiden, 1628), the most lavish fencing book ever produced, which was kindly lent by the Museum's Thomas J. Watson Library. Accompanying the books and giving vivid impact to their illustrations are a selection of swords, rapiers, parrying daggers, bucklers, and other accoutrements, which follow the chronology of, and changes in, fighting styles depicted in the books. These weapons were frequently treated not only as sidearms, but also as fashionable costume accessories. The decoration of hilts, scabbards, and belts often exemplifies the prevailing artistic styles of a given period, from Renaissance and Mannerism through Baroque and Rococo to Neoclassical. Hilts were designed by well-known engravers such as Hans Sebald Beham and Virgil Solis, leading goldsmiths including Wenzel Jamnitzer and Luigi Valadier, and major artists from Hans Holbein and Giulio Romano to Jacques Louis David.

Today the term "fencing" calls to mind familiar images of a competitive sport, but in the past, rather than a sporting event, "fencing" referred to practical methods of self-defense. Early books on fencing, prior to about 1800, were concerned with the proper handling of weapons, which was an integral part of the education of European noblemen. Formalized training in the use of arms was also widely practiced by sons of the middle class—burghers, merchants, and craftsmen. This democratization of martial skills was due in part to the dissemination of illustrated fencing books, written by the foremost Masters of Arms—highly regarded professionals who were skilled in the use of weapons.

The earliest book included here is a sixteenth-century manuscript copy of a fifteenth-century treatise, which deals principally with judicial single combat between armored opponents equipped with a variety of weapons. Most fencing books of the sixteenth century are concerned

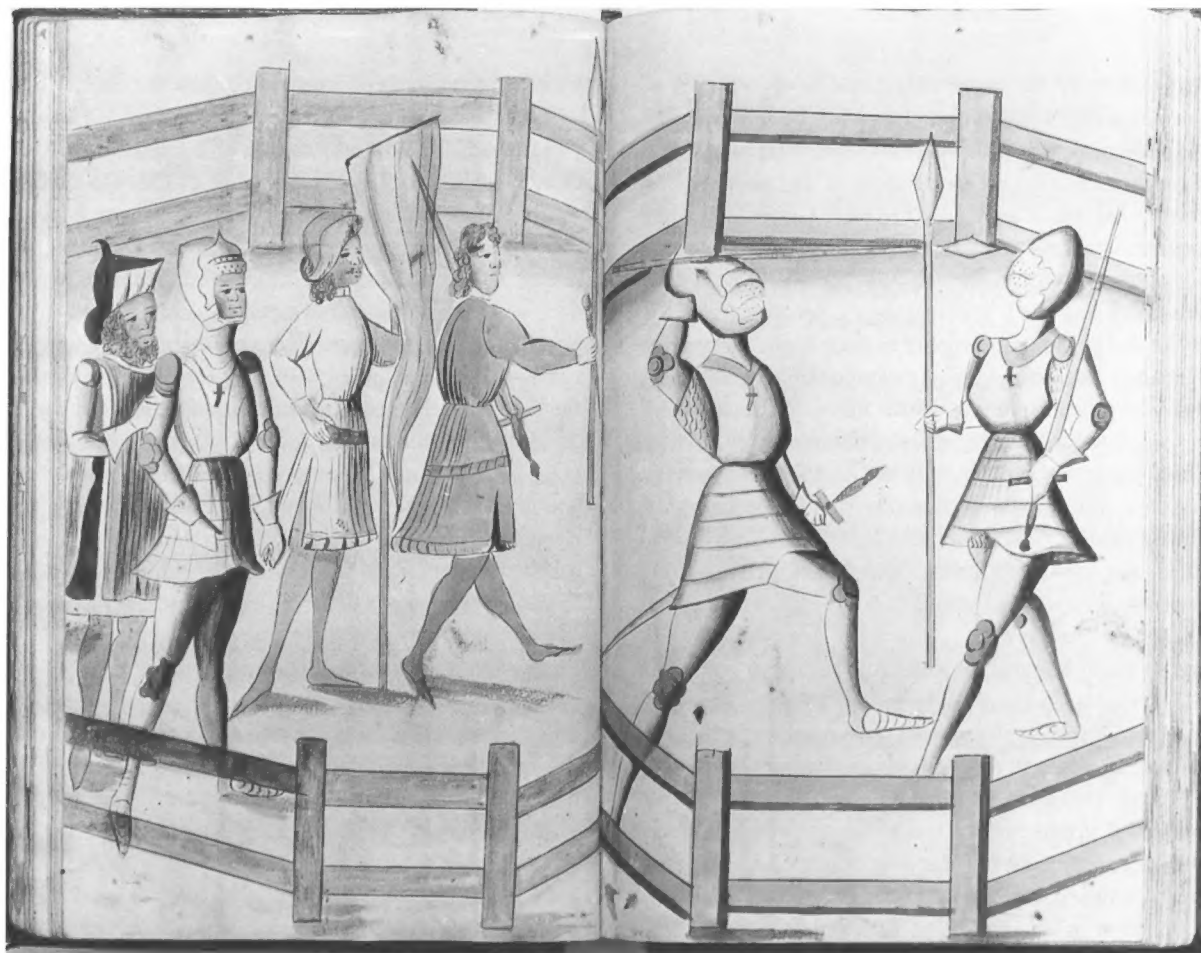
with bouts between unarmored duelists but continue to include the use of several different weapons: sword and rapier used alone or in tandem with a dagger, shield, or even a cloak in the left hand; the use of the two-handed sword, spear, halberd and quarter-staff; and methods of unarmed combat. By the early seventeenth century the rapier, a long, slender thrusting sword, began to dominate as the gentleman's weapon of choice, and most books of the period become increasingly devoted to the use of the rapier alone or with a left-hand dagger. During the course of the century, as civilian fencing techniques became more specialized and refined, the rapier developed into a lighter, trimmed-down weapon known by about 1700 as the smallsword. The smallsword, often richly decorated, remained an integral part of a gentleman's wardrobe until the wearing of swords in civilian settings went out of fashion at the end of the eighteenth century, at which time pistols were replacing swords as the weapons most frequently used in personal duels. During the early nineteenth century swordsmanship progressively diverged between military training and sporting practice, from which modern competitive fencing developed.

Between 1500 and 1800 fencing was known as "the art and science of defense." The books and weapons included in *The Academy of the Sword* offer an overview of ways in which fencing was taught and the arms with which it was practiced during these three centuries.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Valuable help regarding the history of fencing and fencing books was generously given by J. Christoph Amberger, Richard J. Gradkowski, and S. Matthew Galas. Advice concerning translations was kindly provided by Stefano Carboni, Helmut Nickel, and James D. Lavin. Our gratitude is also extended to Joseph A. Suárez, Esq., and The Armor and Arms Club of New York, whose support made this publication possible.

Books



Hans Talhoffer

German, recorded 1435–82

Fechtbuch (*Fencing Book*)

Gift of Miss Marguerite Keasbey, 1926 26.236

This volume is a rare early-sixteenth-century copy of one of the earliest surviving European fencing manuals, Hans Talhoffer's influential *Fechtbuch* (*Fencing Book*), written in 1443. Talhoffer was following a tradition established by Johannes Liechtenauer, an itinerant master swordsman of the fourteenth century who recorded the secrets of his fighting techniques in the form of cryptic verses. The Talhoffer manuscript includes verses from Liechtenauer,

sections devoted to the procedures for fighting judicial combats both with and without armor, and the use of the weapons employed in such combats, including the highly specialized *Steckschilde* (thrusting shields), maces, long swords, spears, and daggers. There are also sections on knife fighting and wrestling, the latter based on the methods of Ott the Jew, a renowned wrestling master to the archdukes of Austria.



Maximilian I, von Habsburg

Austrian, 1459–1519

Weisskunig (*The White King*)

Vienna, 1775

Weisskunig is an allegorical autobiography written by Maximilian (who reigned as king of the Romans from 1486 and as Holy Roman Emperor from 1493) and his private secretary Marx Treitzsaurwein (d. 1527) beginning about 1506. Illustrated with 251 woodcut prints, the book tells the story of Maximilian's life and describes his many talents,

including the mastery of swordsmanship and other martial skills. Hans Burgkmair (1473–1531) designed 117 of the woodcuts, some of which are considered among his most accomplished works. One of many elaborate projects initiated by Maximilian to perpetuate his memory, the book was not published in its entirety until this edition of 1775.

SECONDO
SECVITA EL SECONDO LIBRO ELQ VALE TRATTA
DE ABATTIMENTI DE ARME DA FILO VA
RIATE LVNO DA LALTRO.



Cap. 36, Che dinota Spada e Pugnale,
QUESTO SIE vno abattimento molto perfetto, per fare a cortella
late de Spada e Pugnale Bolognese: Nota che tu che vorrai insegnare
che in l'arte de fare, a cortellate nō se po fare piu che in li feriri natu
ralmente. cioe mandritto, e rouerso, e stocata, ma piu te dico, chel se po fare mol
ti altri feriri, ma generalmēte quasi ogni homo tira cosi. Hora nota che ho tra
corso de fantasia bona, & ogni mēse, quele cose che a me hanno parse piu bre
ue, & piu vtile, per vno che hauesse a combattere si che nota per regola vera.

Achille Marozzo

Italian, born 1484

*Opera nova de Achille Marozzo Bolognese, mastro generale
de l'arte de l'armi*

*(New Work by Achille Marozzo of Bologna, Master General
of the Art of Arms)*

Modena, 1536

Marozzo was among the earliest in a long line of renowned Bolognese swordsmen who published influential fencing books. His *Opera Nova* was reprinted several times between 1536 and 1568 and is considered the first printed fencing book to have received relatively wide distribution.

Marozzo's stated aim was to explain the proper use of all weapons necessary to a man in defending his honor. He includes the use of the sword alone and with a dagger held in the left hand or with different types of small shields or even with a cloak (wrapped around the left arm); of two swords (one in each hand); of the large two-handed sword; and of various types of shafted weapons (spears, pikes, halberds, etc.). One chapter is devoted to unarmed defense against the dagger. Marozzo also discusses the rules governing formal single combat between noblemen.

Achille Marozzo

Italian, born 1484

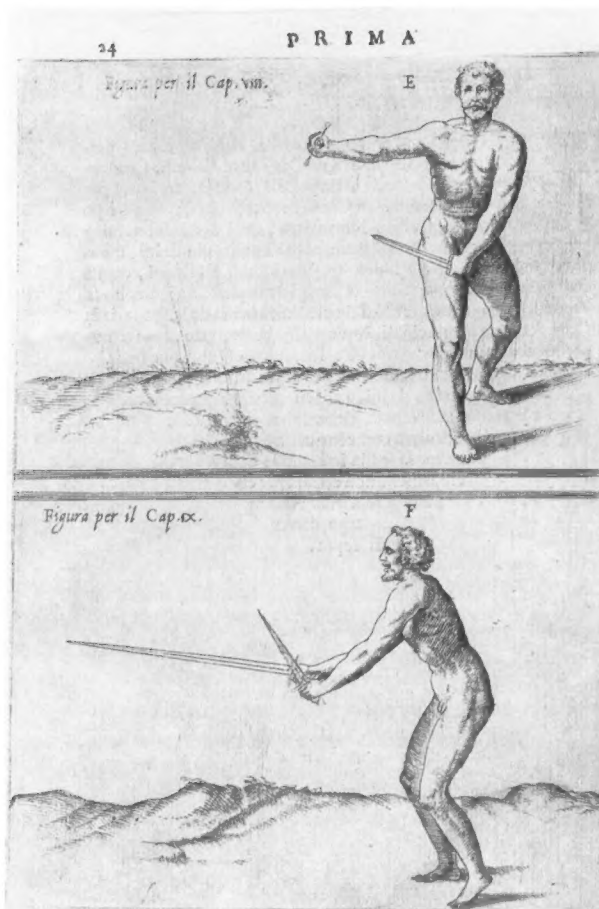
Arte dell'armi di Achille Marozzo Bolognese

(*The Art of Arms, by Achille Marozzo of Bologna*)

Venice, 1568

Published after Marozzo's death, the text, with some modifications to reflect changes in fighting styles, remains basically that of the *Opera Nova* of 1536. The original woodcuts have been replaced with engravings by Giovanni Battista Fontana (1524–1587), and Giulio Fontana (d. 1569). Giulio Fontana added a new preface to the 1568 edition dedicated to Don Giovanni Manriche, Camerieri di S. M. Cesarea,

probably referring to Juan Manrique, chamberlain to Elizabeth Valois (1545–1568), queen of Spain. Fontana goes on to mention his illustrations for another fencing book, Camillo Agrippa's *Trattato di Scienza d'Arme*, published two weeks before Marozzo's *Arte dell'Armi*, which he had also dedicated to Don Giovanni Manriche.



Camillo Agrippa

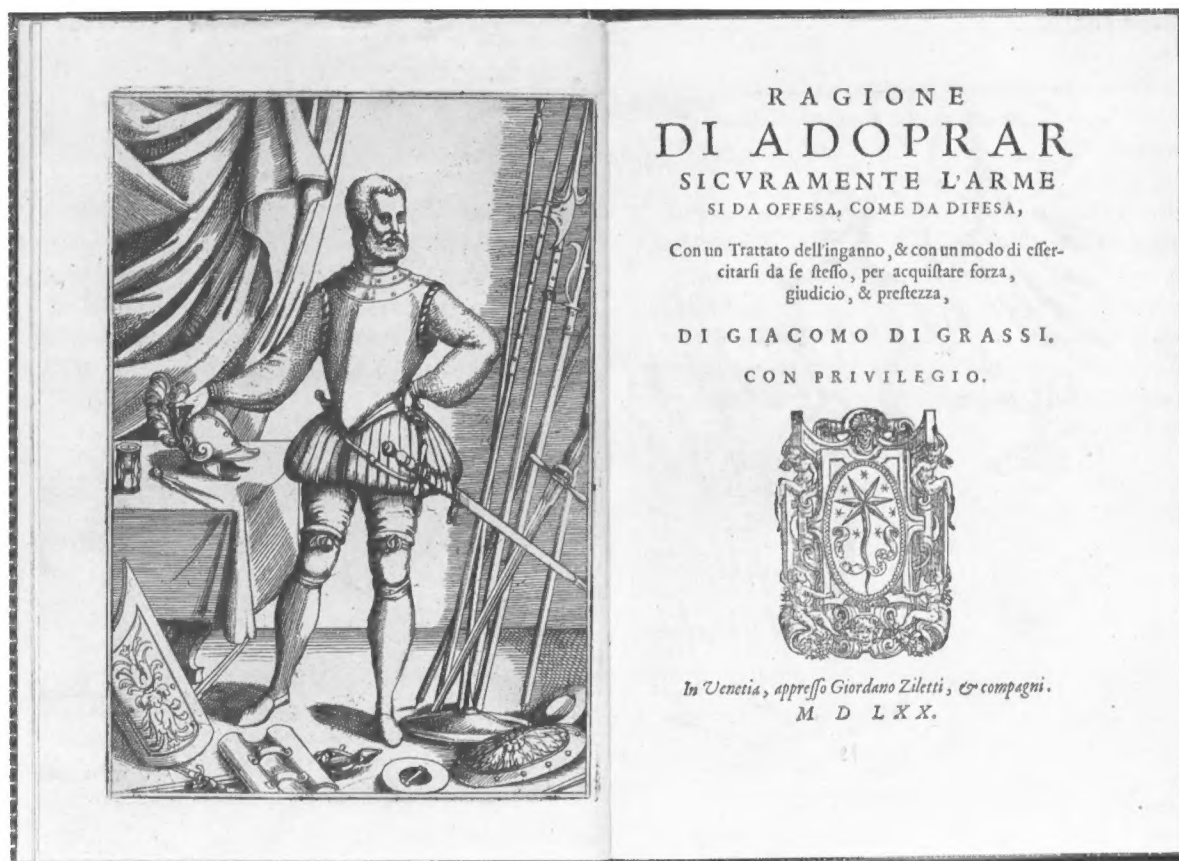
Italian, active 1535–95

Trattato di scienza d'arme et un dialogo in detta materia

(*Treatise on the Science of Arms and a Dialogue on the Same Theme*)

Venice, 1568

The first edition of the *Trattato* was published by Agrippa in Rome in 1553 with a dedication to Cosimo de Medici (1519–1574), duke of Florence. This is the second edition, with new illustrations by Giulio Fontana. Both editions conclude with a philosophical dialogue between Agrippa and the humanist writer Annibale Caro (1507–1566), famous for his vernacular translation of Virgil's *Aeneid*. Unlike Marozzo, Agrippa was not a professional in the science of arms. However, Agrippa's fighting techniques were innovative, based on practical application, and in many ways represented an improvement upon Marozzo's methods. Agrippa's other published works concern engineering, mathematics, and philosophy.



Giacomo di Grassi

Italian, active second half of the 16th century

Ragione di adoprar sicuramente l'arme si da offesa, come da difesa, con un trattato dell'inganno, & con un modo di essercitarsi da se stesso, per acquistare forza, giudizio, & prestezza

(The Correct Method of Safely Using Arms, Both for Offense, as Well as for Defense, with a Treatise on Deceit, and with a Way to Train on One's Own, in Order to Obtain Strength, Judgment, and Dexterity)

Venice, 1570

Di Grassi's techniques exemplified the widely emulated Italian school. His book became the first surviving English-language fencing book when it was translated and published in London in 1594. The majority of di Grassi's text is devoted to fencing with sword and dagger, buckler, or cloak, in addition to use of the sword alone. He looks forward to advanced rapier techniques of the seventeenth century by stressing the superiority of a thrust over a cutting blow whenever possible. He was the first to categorize the sword blade as having four sections distinctly suited for attack or defense, and to define the concept of "lines" of defense—inside, outside, high, or low—as they are still understood in modern fencing.



Angelo Viggiani

Italian, active second half of the 16th century

Lo schermo d'Angelo Viggiani dal Montone da Bologna
(Fencing, by Angelo Viggiani dal Montone, from Bologna)
Venice, 1575

Viggiani, who had been a soldier under the emperor Charles V, wrote this book in 1560 after leaving imperial service and returning to his homeland. It was published posthumously some fifteen years later by Viggiani's brother Battista. Like Agrippa and di Grassi, Viggiani emphasized the use of the thrust as more effective than the cut, going further than his predecessors in defining positions for attacking with the point. He was among the first to favor a stance in which the right foot is always foremost and to describe an attack that can be considered a lunge in modern fencing terms.

ABOVE

Joachim Meyer

German, active 16th–17th century

Gründtliche Beschreibung der freyen ritterlichen unnd adelichen Kunst des Fechtens in allerley gebrauchlichen Wehren mit vil schönen und nützlichen Figuren gezieret und fürgestellt

(A Thorough Description of the Free Knightly and Noble Art of Fencing, in All the Typical Guards, Adorned and Arranged with Many Beautiful and Useful Figures)

Strasbourg, 1570

Gift of Christian A. Zabriskie, 1957 57.118

Meyer was one of the most influential later proponents of the German long sword, following the techniques first codified two centuries earlier by Johannes Liechtenauer. Meyer's manual appeared in four editions between 1570 and 1660. It is divided into five sections, the first and longest dealing with the art of the long sword. The others include instruction in the *Dussack* (a saberlike wooden practice weapon indigenous to Germany), rapier techniques based on the Italian school, dagger fighting, and the use of various staff weapons.

Luis Pacheco de Narváez

Spanish, active late 16th–early 17th century

Libro de las grandezas de la espada, en que se declaran muchos secretos del que compuso el Comendador Geronimo de Carrança

(*Book of the Greatness of the Sword, in Which Many of the Secrets of the Methods Developed by Comendador Geronimo de Carrança Are Explained*)

Madrid, 1600

Narváez, along with his predecessor Geronimo de Carrança, was one of the founders of an enduring and distinctive school of rapier fencing, which was practiced in Spain and its dominions from the late sixteenth century until the late eighteenth century. Notable features of the Spanish style included a very upright stance and circular footwork based on complex geometric principles.

Salvator Fabris (Salvatore Fabrizzio?)

Italian (Padua), 1544–1617(?)

De lo schermo overo scienza d' arme di Salvator Fabris capo dell' Ordine dei Sette Cori

(*About Fencing, or Rather, the Science of Arms, by Salvator Fabris, Head of the Order of the Seven Hearts*)

Copenhagen, 1606

Published with the patronage of Christian IV, king of Denmark, this book was very important in promoting the Italian style of rapier fencing in northern Europe, and was reprinted as late as 1713. Avoiding the philosophical interpolations otherwise common to the genre, Fabris wrote a detailed fencing manual with text and illustrations devoted solely to practical swordsmanship. His methodology included many refinements, several of which remained in use into the nineteenth century wherever cut-and-thrust fencing was practiced.

RIGHT

Ridolfo Capo Ferro

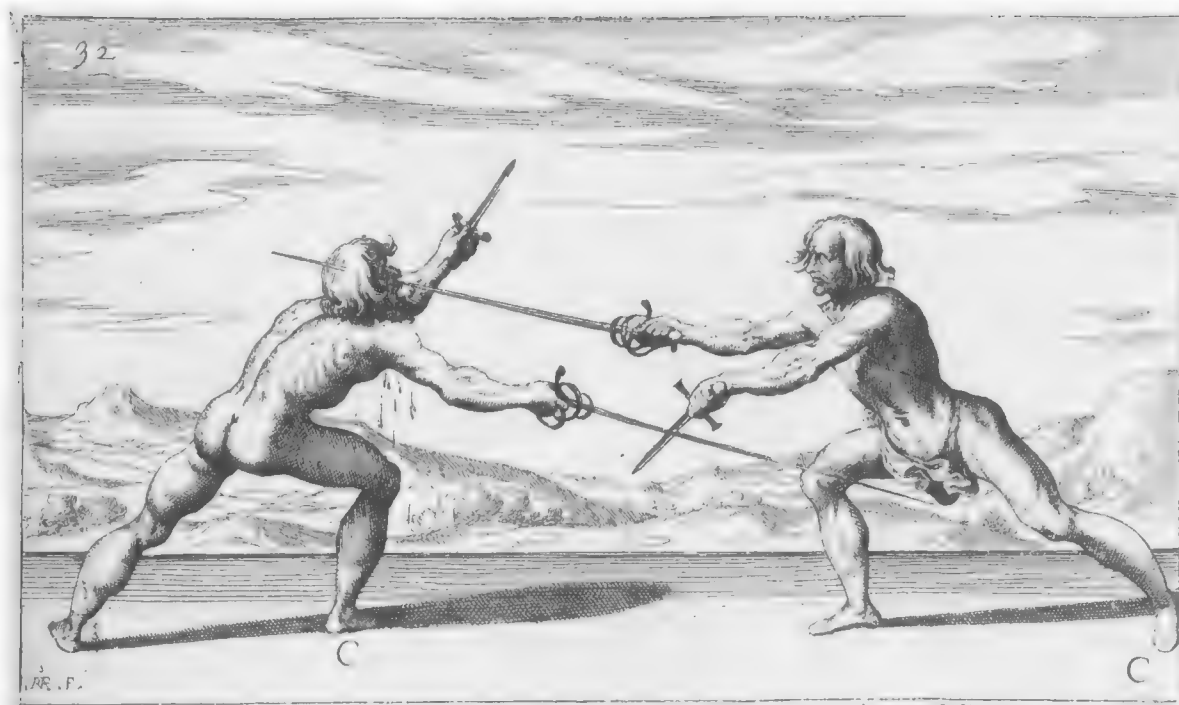
Italian (Cagli), born ca. 1558

Gran simulacro dell'arte e dell'uso della scherma, di Ridolfo Capo Ferro da Caglie, maestro dell'eccelsa nazione alemanna, nell' inclita città di Siena

(*A Complete Representation of the Art and Practice of Fencing, by Ridolfo Capo Ferro of Caglie, Teacher of the Sublime German Nation, in the Famous City of Siena*)

Siena, 1610

Capo Ferro's precise and rationally organized book represents the apogee of the Italian rapier school. It largely defined the form in which the school flourished across Europe for much of the seventeenth century, and from which smallsword techniques subsequently developed. The text is attractively illustrated with engravings by Raffaello Schiamirossi (ca. 1572–1622), and is divided into thirteen chapters ranging from a general introduction to clear explanations of timing, distance, posture, guards, and attacks. Although Capo Ferro included the left-hand dagger, he emphasized the use of the rapier alone as the most effective means of both offense and defense.



Nicoletto Giganti

Italian, active Venice ca. 1600

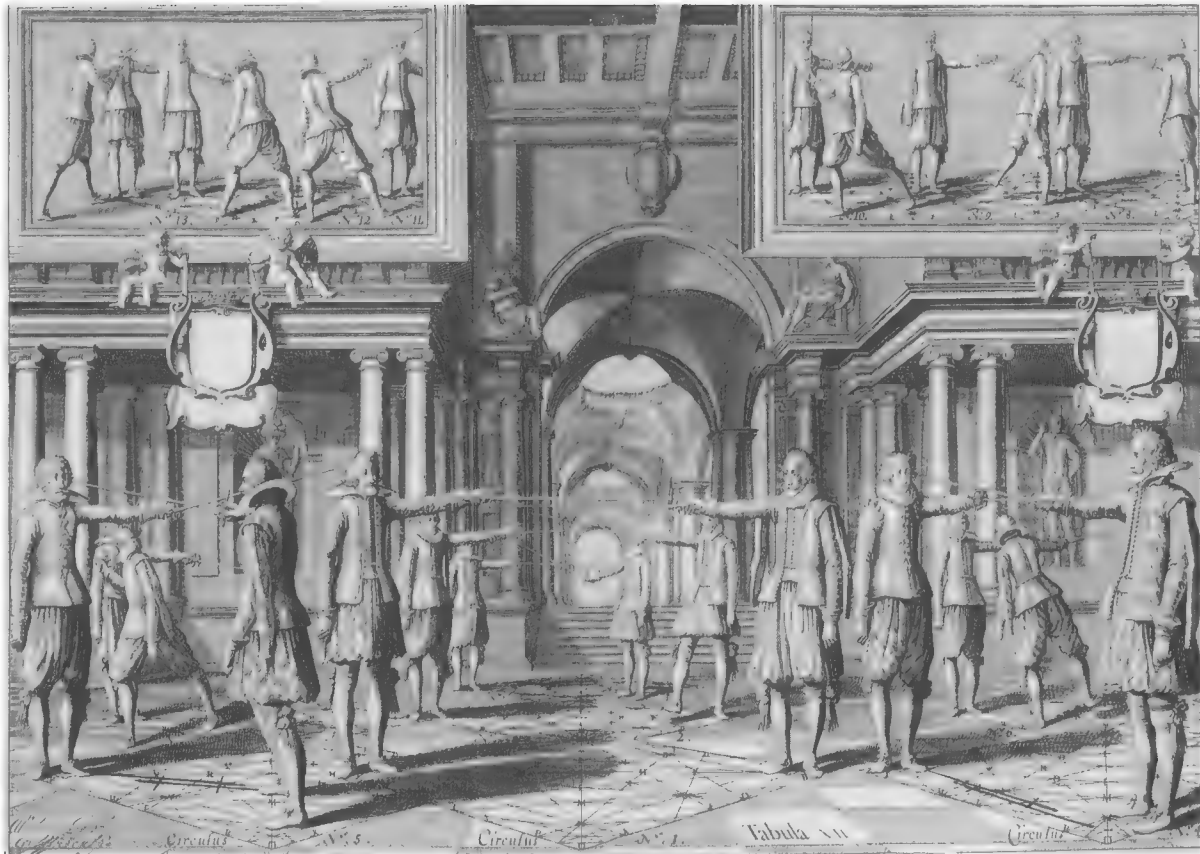
Neue Fechtkunst, oder Schawplatz / darauff allerhand Arten zuversetzen und zuschlagen mit dem Rapier allein / und mit Rapier und Dolchen zusammen / vortestellet

(The New Art of Fencing, or The Theater in Which Is Shown Every Type of Parry and Blow with Rapier Alone and with Rapier and Dagger Together)

Frankfurt, 1622

Giganti was the forerunner of Salvator Fabris and Ridolfo Capo Ferro in bringing Italian rapier fencing to its highest degree of refinement. Beginning in 1606 books by Giganti were published in Italian, French, and German, including bilingual editions like this German and French example, translated and published by Jacob de Zeter. Giganti was

the first fencing master to clearly explain the advantages of the lunge and to apply it to most of his attack strategies. His methods represent a transition in the Italian school between use of the rapier with a companion dagger and the preference for the rapier alone.



Girard Thibault

Flemish (Antwerp), died ca. 1629

Académie de l'espée de Girard Thibault, d'Anvers, où se demonstrent par régles mathématiques sur le fondement d'un cercle mystérieux, la théorie et pratique des vrais et iusqu'à présent incognus secrets du manient des armes à pied et a cheval

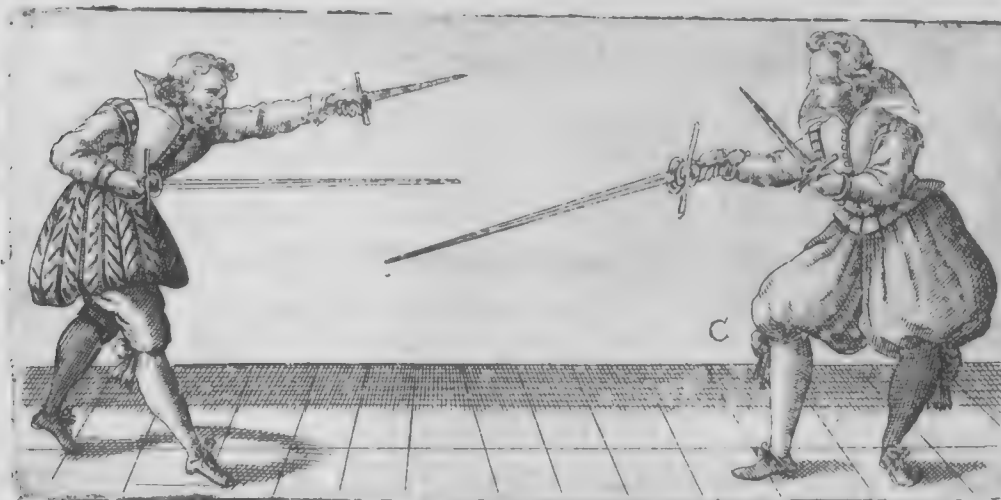
(The Academy of the Sword by Girard Thibault, of Antwerp, wherein Are Set Forth by Mathematical Rules, on the Basis of a Mysterious Circle, the True and until Now Unknown Secrets of the Use of Weapons on Foot and on Horseback)

Leiden, 1628

Generally acknowledged as the most lavish and artistically accomplished fencing book ever produced, Thibault's *Academy of the Sword* was supported by the patronage of King Louis XIII of France and several other European rulers. Its elaborate illustrations, including forty-six double-page plates, are signed by sixteen Flemish engravers. The

book is devoted to the Spanish school of fence, as established earlier by Geronimo de Carrançá and Luis Pacheco de Narváez. Thibault died shortly before its publication, never having completed the projected second part, which was to have dealt with equestrian combat.

Kling Kreuz halte ein wenig höher dann dein recht knie / vnd dein Klingen spitz laß gerad vor sich aufsehen / so wirstu den innwendigen Leib damit bloß geben / vnd dein Dolch strecke wol vor dich hinauß / wie diese Figuren weisen.



Wird er dann vnter dein Dolch hinein stoßen so parir mit dem Dolch vnten nach seiner linken seiten hinweg / vnd stoß geschwind mit der Quarta zugleich mit ihm mit einem zu tritt des rechten Fuß innerhalb seiner Klingen hinein nach seiner rechten brust zu.

Auff

Sebastian Heussler

German (Nuremberg), active early to mid-17th century

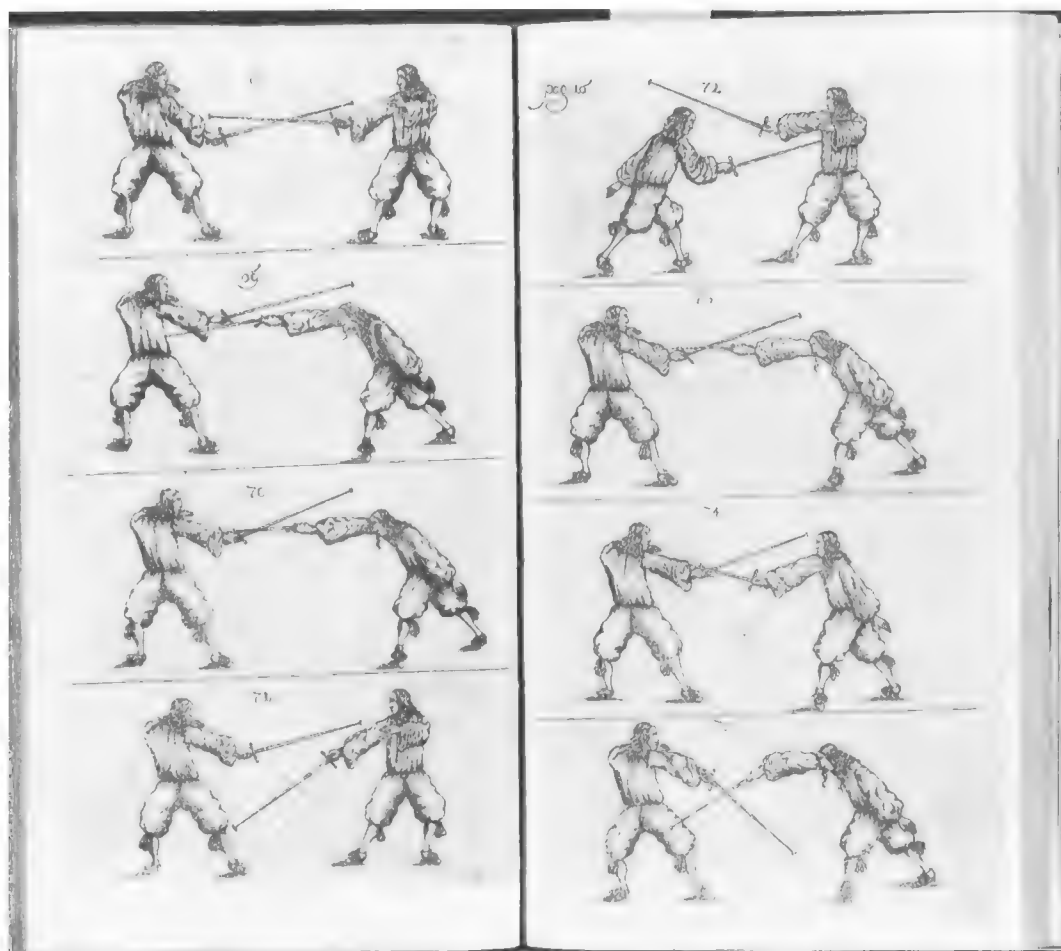
Neu kunstlich Fechtbuch darinnen 500 Stuck im ainfachen Rapier, wie auch ettliche im Rapier vnd Dolch, deß wetberümbten Fecht: und lehrmeisters Sig. Salvator Fabrida Padoa, so wol auch anderer italianischen und französichen Fechter...

(New Artistic Fencing Book in Which There Are 500 Movements with Rapier Alone, as well as Many with Rapier and Dagger, from the Well-Known Fencing Master and Instructor Signor Salvator Fabrida of Padua, as well as Other Italian and French Fencers...)

Nuremberg, 1615 and 1645

The influence of Italian fencing masters in Germany is especially apparent in the works of the Nuremberg fencing instructor Sebastian Heussler, who cites Salvator Fabris as his inspiration for the two books bound together in this volume, and Capo Ferro for other editions. The first book is unusual in that the dates on the title page and of the

author's preface have been changed by hand from 1615 to 1645. It is bound with a 1615 edition of another book by Heussler, devoted solely to the use of rapier and dagger. This is followed by twelve unnumbered plates showing dagger fighting and the use of rapier and cloak.



ABOVE

Johann Georg Paschen

German (Saxony), active mid- to late 17th century

Kurtze jedoch deutliche Beschreibung handlend vom Fechten auf Stosz und Hieb

(Brief but Clear Description Concerning Fencing with the Thrust and the Cut)

Halle, 1664

Paschen published at least five fencing books between 1657 and 1683. This edition is dedicated to Johann Georg II, prince-elect of Saxony (r. 1656–81), whom Paschen served as *Pagen Hoffmeistern* (master of the court pages) in Magdeburg. The first part of the book demonstrates a modified form of rapier technique, showing the influence of proto-smallsword fencing as it was then being developed in France. The second part is devoted to the more martially oriented method of fighting with the edge of the sword, rather than the point.

Jéann Daniel L'Ange

French, active Germany, mid- to late 17th century

Deutliche und gründliche Erklärung der adelichen und ritterlichen freyen Fecht-Kunst. Lectionen auff den Stoß und deren Gebrauchs eigentlicher Nachricht. Auff die rechte italianische Art und Manir...

(Clear and Thorough Explanation of the Noble and Knightly Free Art of Fencing. Selections Concerning the Thrust and an Accurate Description of Its Usage. In the Correct Italian Style and Manner...)

Heidelberg, 1664

L'Ange was the fencing master at Heidelberg University and at the court of Karl I (1617–1680), prince-elect of the Palatinate of the Rhine and duke of Bavaria. His book is an example of the late Italian school of rapier fencing, as it was practiced in Germany well into the eighteenth century. The frontispiece displays a portrait of L'Ange beneath a poetic couplet, which probably would have expressed the sentiments of many fencing masters: "In God lies my salvation / But my sword is my protection."

Francisco Antonio de Ettenhard

Spanish, active mid- to late 17th century

Compendio de los fundamentos de la verdadera destreza y filosofia de las armas, dedicado a la catolica, sacra, y real magestad del rey nuestro senor D. Carlos Segundo, monarca de Espana, y de las Indias
(*Compendium of the Fundamentals of the True Skills and Philosophy of Arms, Dedicated to the Catholic, Sacred, and Royal Majesty of the King Our Lord Don Carlos the Second, Monarch of Spain, and the Indies*)
Madrid, 1675

Ettenhard's work shows the continuity of the Spanish school, which remained faithful to the complex geometric principles laid down by Luis Pacheco de Narváez and embellished by Gerard Thibault.

Jean Baptiste Le Perche du Coudray

French, active mid- to late 17th century

L'exercice des armes, ou Maniment du fleuret, pour ayder la memoire de ceux qui sont amateurs de cet art
(*The Exercise of Arms, or Handling the Foil, as an Aid to the Memory of Those Who Are Amateurs of This Art*)
Paris, n.d. (1750)

This is a slightly amended reprint of a book originally published in 1676, when the French style of smallsword fencing was beginning to flourish. It is one of the first books to focus on the use of the foil, as opposed to the sword, as a graceful pastime and a refined form of gentlemanly exercise. Le Perche was a member of the prestigious Académie d'Armes, the guildlike association of fencing masters founded with royal patronage in Paris about 1570. He is credited with formulating the use of the riposte, a technique fundamental to modern fencing.

Wernesson de Liancour

French, died 1732

Le maistre d'armes, ou L'exercice de l'espée seulle dans sa perfection
(*The Master of Arms, or The Exercise of the Single Sword in Its Perfection*)
Amsterdam, 1692

This edition of de Liancour's *Le maistre d'armes* is a slightly simplified reduction of the original version, published in 1686. These books were among the most influential in establishing and spreading the new French style of fencing in Europe and England well into the eighteenth century. Using a smaller, lighter thrusting sword than the rapier common in Italy and Germany, French smallsword techniques as refined by de Liancour emphasized speed, finesse, and economy of motion. De Liancour is also credited with developing the lunge into its fully modern form.

Bondì di Mazo

Italian (Venice), active late 17th century

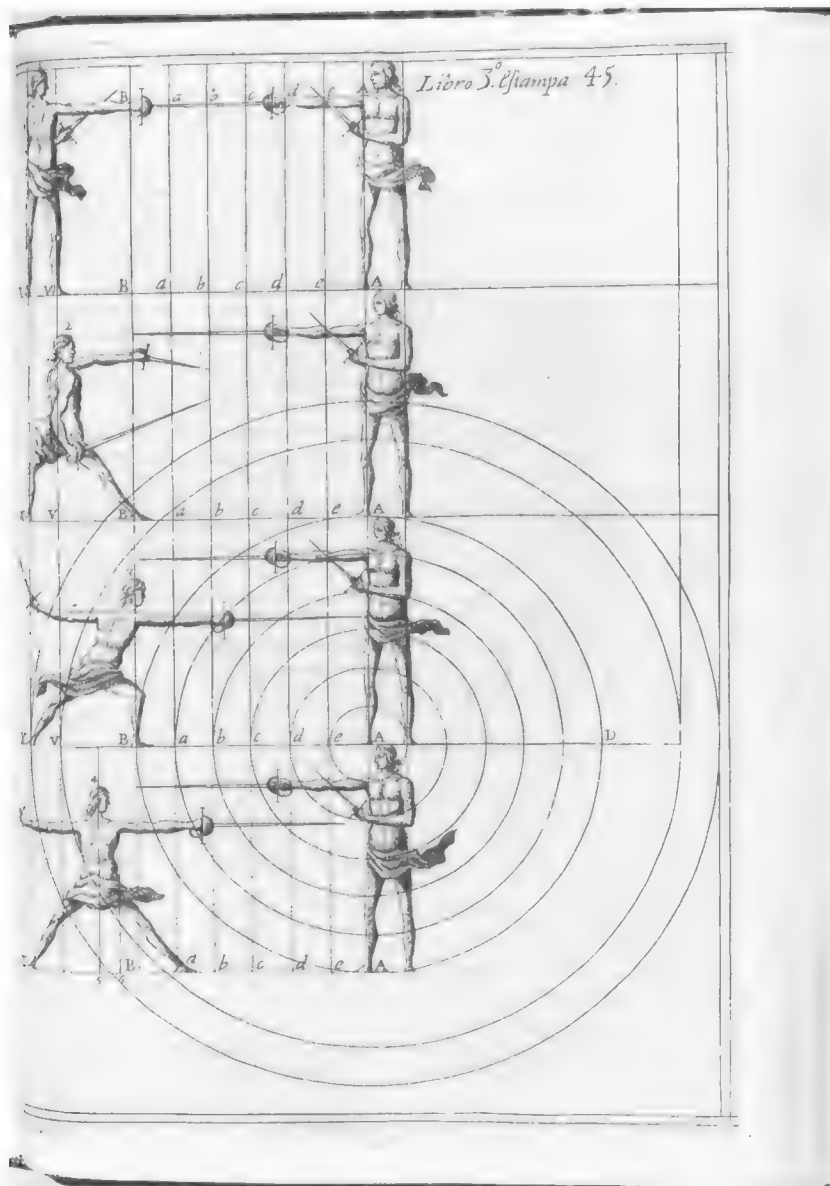
La spada maestra di me, Bondì di Mazo da Venetia: Libro dove si trattano i vantaggi della nobilissima professione della scherma sì del camminare, girare, & ritirarsi, come del ferire sicuramente, e difendersi
(*The Masterly Sword, by Me Bondì di Mazo from Venice: A Book wherein Are Treated the Benefits of the Most Noble Profession of Fencing, in the Advancing, Turning, and Retreating, as well as How to Strike with Certainty, and Defend Oneself*)
Venice, 1696

Henry Blackwell

English, active late 17th to mid-18th century

The English Fencing-Master: or, The Compleat Tuterour of the Small Sword. Wherein the Truest Method, after a Mathematical Rule, Is Plainly Laid Down. Shewing also How Necessary It Is for All Gentlemen to Learn This Noble Art. In a Dialogue between Master and Scholar
London, 1702

This appears to be the earliest edition of Blackwell's book, which was republished in two editions in 1702 and 1705 with additional illustrations, and in a revised edition in 1730 retitled *The Gentleman's Tutor for the Small-Sword*. As a professional Master of Defense Blackwell approached smallsword fencing as a means of lethal combat and not merely as a gentlemanly exercise. His later book is largely based on the practices of Italian rapier masters of the early seventeenth century, perhaps in response to what he saw as the increased rarefaction of smallsword fencing.



Francisco Lorenz de Rada

Spanish, active late 17th to early 18th century

Nobleza de la espada, cuyo esplendor se expresa en tres libros, segun ciencia, arte, y experiencia. Libro primero, de la ciencia del instrumento armigero espada. Libro segundo, arte del instrumento armigero espada. Libro tercero, experiencia del instrumento armigero

(The Nobility of the Sword, Whose Splendor Is Expressed in Three Books, According to Science, Art, and Experience. Book One, concerning the Science of the Warlike Sword. Book Two, the Art of the Warlike Sword. Book Three, the Experience of the Warlike Sword)

Madrid, 1705

Rada's three volumes represent the most detailed treatment of swordsmanship and the Spanish school of fence published in Spanish. Complex mathematical principles defining distance, footwork, lines of attack, and positions of defense are laid out in a series of ornate diagrams.

Despite the apparent artificiality of this system, the fighting abilities of Spanish swordsmen were highly regarded throughout Europe. As late as the end of the eighteenth century the works of the leading smallsword masters such as Guillaume Danet and Domenico Angelo included special techniques for duels with Spaniards.

Johann Andreas Schmidt

German, Zeblitz (Saxony), active 18th century

Leib-beschirmende und feinden trotz-bietende Fecht-kunst; oder: Leicht und getreue Anweisung auf Stoß und Hieb zierlich und sicher zu fechten; nebst einem curieusen Unterricht vom Voltigiren und Ringen.

(The Lifesaving and Foe-Defying Art of Fencing; or: Easy and Trust-worthy Instructions on How to Fence with Thrust-and-Cut Gracefully and Confidently; together with Some Highly Interesting Lessons Concerning the Vaulting Horse and Wrestling)

Nuremberg, 1713

This book is the earliest of several works by Schmidt that were published between 1713 and 1816, the later editions appearing posthumously. Schmidt held the prestigious post of Fencing and Drill Master to the city of Nuremberg. He taught practical methods of fencing with the point, with the edge, and combining the two. Schmidt's chapter on the vaulting horse, once a necessary cavalry exercise, is a precursor to the pommel horse of modern gymnastics. His later books cover the use of the saber, an essential cavalry weapon in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

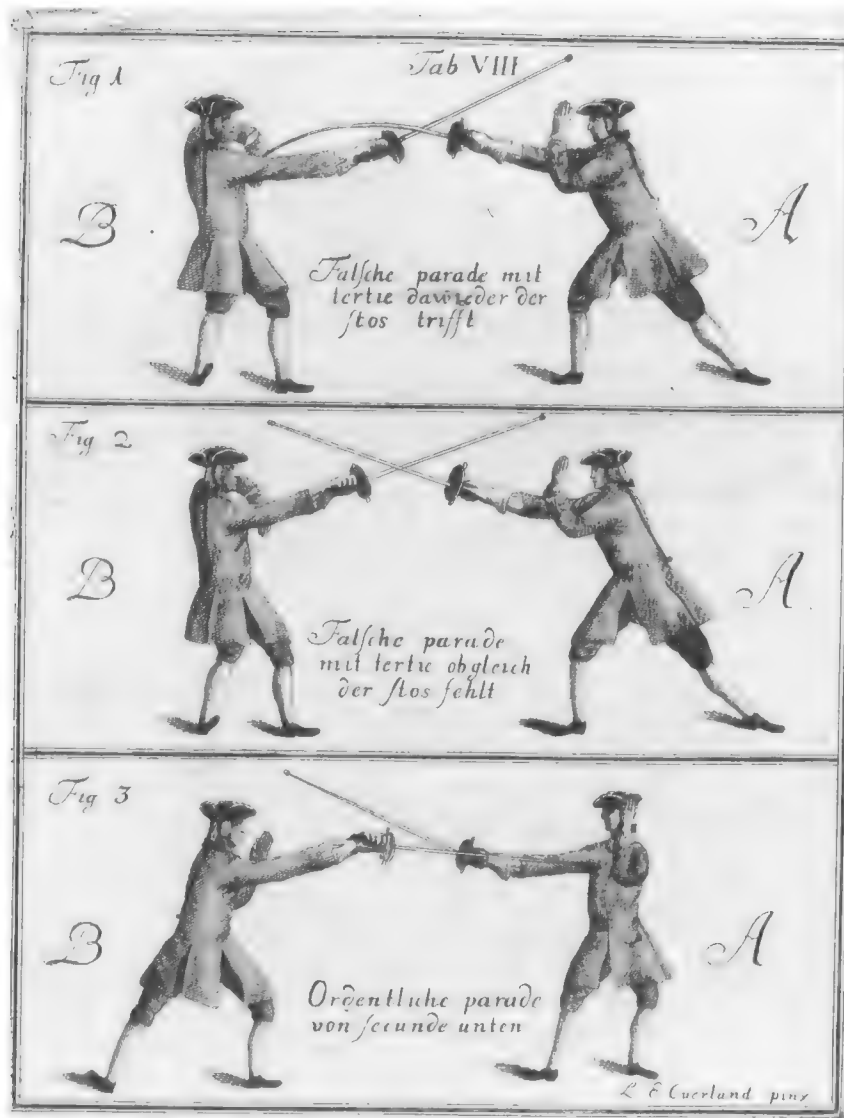
Sir William Hope

Scottish, 1660–1729

Hope's New Method of Fencing: or, The True and Solid Art of Fighting with the Back-Sword, Sheering-Sword, Small-Sword, and Sword and Pistol; Freed from the Errors of the Schools

Edinburgh, 1714

Hope was recognized by his contemporaries as the greatest British authority on swordsmanship. He published eight influential books on the subject, in various editions, between 1687 and 1729. In this book he significantly modified his previous views to advocate a position known as the hanging guard, proclaiming it to be the optimal offensive and defensive guard for any type of sword. In 1692 Sir William founded the Society of Swordsmen in Scotland, in hopes of bringing to British fencing masters the prestige and credibility enjoyed by their counterparts on the Continent. Despite his efforts, however, the Society was never granted a royal charter, remaining merely an association of interested amateurs.



Anthon Friedrich Kahn

German, active early to mid-18th century

Anfangsgründe der Fechtkunst nebst einer Vorrede von dem Nutzen der Fechtkunst und den Vorzügen dieser Anweisung

(Elements of the Art of Fencing together with a Prologue Regarding the Benefits of the Art of Fencing and the Merits of These Instructions)

Göttingen, 1739

German universities were major centers of fencing instruction from as early as the seventeenth century. Anthon Friedrich Kahn, a celebrated fencing master at Göttingen University, was himself a pupil of Heinrich Wilhelm Kreussler at Jena University. Kreussler was a member of one of Germany's most renowned family dynasties of fencing masters, which flourished for nearly two hundred years. Kahn, like Kreussler, taught the use of cut-and-thrust fencing, as well as a method intended for dueling that emphasized the use of the point, but was distinct from the Italian and French schools of late rapier and smallsword techniques.



ABOVE

Domenico Angelo (Domenico Angelo Malevolti Tremamondo)

Italian (Livorno), 1717–1802

L' école des armes, avec l'explication générale des principales attitudes et positions concernant L'escrime

(*The School of Fencing, with a General Explanation of the Principal Attitudes and Positions Peculiar to the Art*)

London, 1765

Angelo is the most well known of all historic fencing masters due to the fame he achieved among his contemporaries, the existence of a detailed biography written by his son, and to the critical and artistic success of his book, *The School of Fencing*. The book was so well regarded that it was selected by Diderot as the best of its genre and used to illustrate the entry on fencing (*escrime*) in his famous *Encyclopédie*. It remains the definitive exposition of smallsword techniques in their most fully developed form.

Guillaume Danet

French, active mid- to late 18th century

L' art des armes, ou La maniere la plus certain de se servir utilement de l'épée, soit pour attaquer, soit pour se défendre, simplifiée & démontrée dans toute son étendue & sa perfection, suivant les meilleurs principes de théorie & de pratique adoptés actuellement en France

(*The Art of Arms, or The Most Reliable Method to Profitably Use the Sword, Either for Attack or Defense, Simplified and Demonstrated in All Its Perfection According to the Best Principles of Theory and Practice Currently Adopted in France*)

Paris, 1766

Partly in response to the success of Angelo's *School of Fencing*, Danet wrote his *L'art des armes* to assert France's claim to supremacy in use of the smallsword. It was also his attempt to codify and simplify the terminology and pedagogy of the French school of fence. Although he was the head of the prestigious Académie des Armes, Danet's suggested reforms were openly attacked by his fellow academicians, forcing him to defend his theories in a second volume, published in 1767.

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(The Art of Arms, or The Most Reliable Method to Profitably Use the Sword, Either for Attack or Defense, Simplified and Demonstrated in All Its Perfection According to the Best Principles of Theory and Practice Currently Adopted in France ... Volume Two, Containing the Rebuttal of the Criticisms, and the Continuation of the Same Treatise)
Paris, 1767

Mr. Angelo (Domenico Angelo Malevolti Tremamondo)

Italian (Livorno), 1717–1802

The School of Fencing, with a General Explanation of the Principal Attitudes and Positions Peculiar to the Art
London, 1787

This is a later edition of the original *School of Fencing* in a smaller, pocket-sized format.

Swords, Rapiers, Parrying Daggers, and Related Objects

Sword

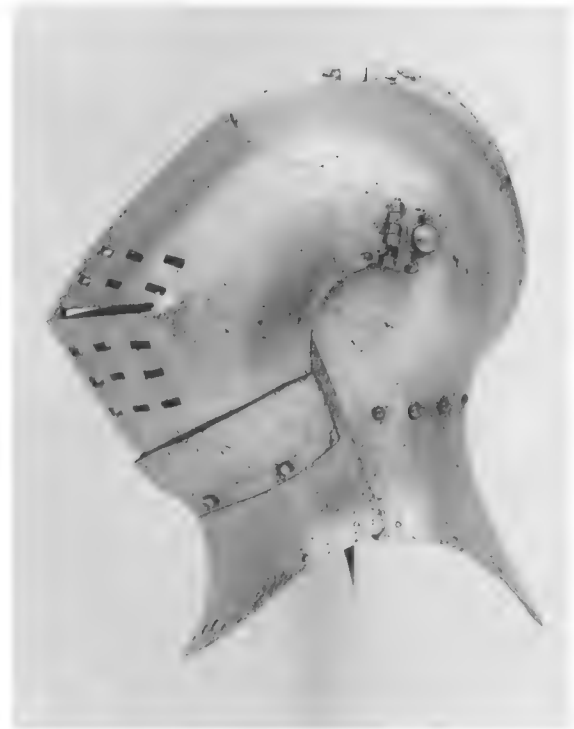
Western European (possibly Italian), ca. 1450
Steel, copper, wood, and leather; weight: 2 lbs. 8 oz.
Gift of William H. Riggs, 1913 14.25.1096

Known as arming swords, weapons of this type were worn by noblemen on a daily basis during times of peace and were also used by armored knights in battle. The blade bears the “running-wolf” mark of Passau, Germany, which was famous for the quality of its sword blades.

Dagger (Ballock Knife)

Possibly French or German, late 15th century
Steel and wood; weight: 8 oz.
Gift of Jean Jacques Reubell, in memory of his mother, Julia C. Coster, and of his wife, Adeline E. Post, both of New York City, 1926 26.145.10

The ballock knife, also referred to as a kidney dagger, was widely used in the later Middle Ages, in both civilian and military contexts. In Talhoffer’s *Fechtbuch* it is shown in use by armored combatants to deliver a coup de grâce, and in the section devoted to unarmored knife fighting.



ABOVE

Helm for Combat on Foot

English or Flemish, late 15th century
Steel; weight: 12 lbs. 12 oz.
Gift of William H. Riggs, 1913 14.25.591

In the nineteenth century this helmet was recorded as coming from St. Mary’s Church, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire, where it presumably once hung above the tomb of its original owner.



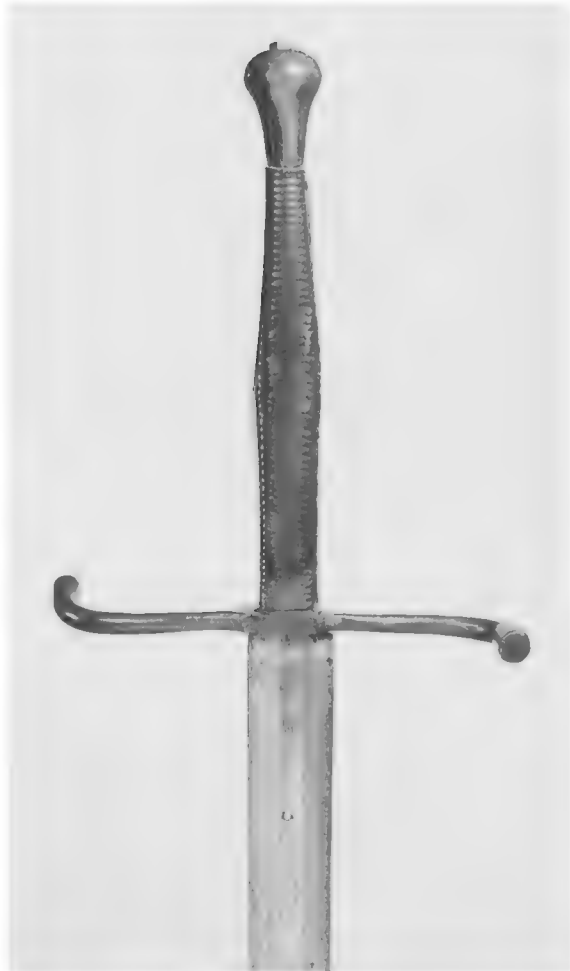
Hand and a Half Sword

German, ca. 1500

Steel and leather; weight: 4 lbs.

Purchase, The Sulzberger Foundation, Inc., and Helmut Nickel Gifts, Rogers Fund, Bequest of Stephen V. Grancsay, by exchange, and Funds from various donors, 1988 1988.26

The blade is incised with the mark of the Ottoman arsenal in Istanbul, indicating that this sword was captured as war booty from a European knight. It is one of the few swords to survive from the early sixteenth century with its original hilt and blade intact.



detail



Sword

Italian or Spanish, ca. 1500

Steel, gilt bronze, wood, and textile;

weight: 2 lbs. 15 oz.

Gift of William H. Riggs, 1913 14.25.1165

This early sword is one of the few to retain fragments of its original grip bindings, here consisting of red and green silk. The stiff, acutely pointed blade is designed to pierce the gaps between the plates of an opponent's armor.

Dagger

German or Italian, ca. 1500–1525

Steel, silver, wood, and fish skin; weight: 1 lb.

Gift of Jean Jacques Reubell, in memory of his mother, Julia C. Coster, and of his wife, Adeline E. Post, both of New York City, 1926 26.145.69

This sturdy dagger is the type seen in early Italian fencing books like those of Achille Marozzo. It predates the improvements that characterize later parrying daggers, such as long, often curved quillons and a side ring to protect the back of the hand.

Dueling Gauntlet (Manopala da Presa)

Italian, ca. 1550–75

Steel and leather; weight: 1 lbs. 9 oz.

Gift of William H. Riggs, 1913 14.25.911

In the sixteenth century it was often considered better to parry (blocking an opponent's blade) with the left hand rather than tie up one's own rapier in deflecting a blow. A gauntlet, usually of leather but sometimes of steel, was worn to protect the left hand. The palm of this gauntlet is lined with mail, which would allow the duelist to grasp his opponent's blade without being cut.

Sword

North Italian or French, ca. 1540–60

Steel and wood; weight: 2 lbs. 6 oz.

Gift of William H. Riggs, 1913 14.25.1155

BELOW

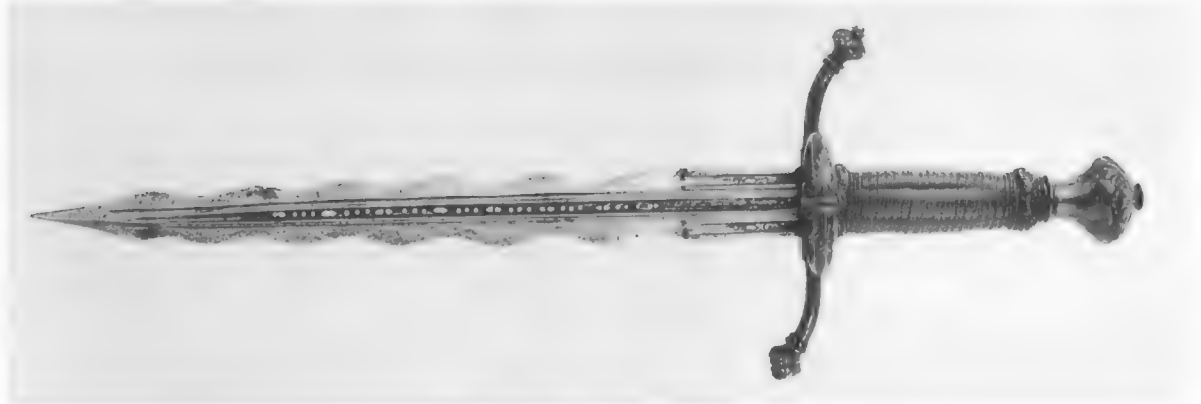
Parrying Dagger (Pugnale Bolognese)

Italian, ca. 1550–75

Partly gilt steel, brass, and wood; weight: 15 oz.

Gift of Jean Jacques Reubell, in memory of his mother, Julia C. Coster, and of his wife, Adeline E. Post, both of New York City, 1926 26.145.94

Designed to be used in tandem with a rapier, this dagger is fitted with a side ring, recurved quillons, and a depression at the base of one side of the blade to accommodate the thumb and facilitate a firmer grip. The waves in the blade may be intended to act like "speed bumps" in breaking the impact of a blow from an opponent's blade.



RIGHT

Parrying Gauntlet (Guanto da Presa)

Italian, late 16th–early 17th century

Leather and iron; weight: 8 oz.

Bashford Dean Memorial Collection, Funds from various donors, 1929 29.158.218

Beneath its leather exterior this parrying gauntlet is lined with a protective layer of mail.



Buckler (Rotellino da Pugno alla Milanese)

Italian, ca. 1570

Steel and copper; weight: 2 lbs. 6 oz.

Gift of William H. Riggs, 1913 14.25.742

Bucklers are small shields that were carried on the belt or scabbard. They were a popular form of defense from at least as early as the thirteenth century until the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century.



LEFT

Buckler (Targhetta da Pugno)

Italian, ca. 1550–75

Blued and gilt steel; weight: 2 lbs. 15 oz.

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Ronald S. Lauder, 1983 1983.136

The hook in the center of the buckler was designed so it could hang from the sword belt, ready for use. The raised concentric bars were intended to trap, and possibly break, an opponent's blade.

RIGHT

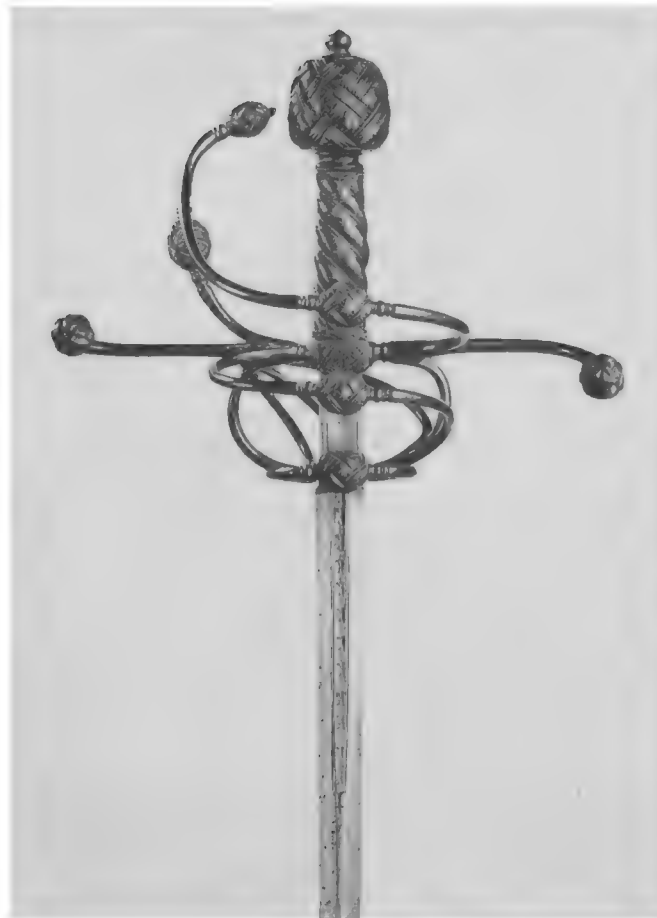
Rapier

European, ca. 1565–75

Steel and wood; weight: 3 lbs. 2 oz.

Gift of William H. Riggs, 1913 14.25.1190

This is a classic form of late-sixteenth-century rapier, sometimes referred to as a “swept hilt” because of the spiraling design of the bars that surround the grip.



LEFT

Parrying Dagger (Pugnale Bolognese)

Italian, ca. 1570

Steel, wood, and leather; weight: 1 lb. 5 oz.

Bequest of Jean Jacques Reubell, in memory of his mother, Julia C. Coster, of New York, 1933 34.57.21

This large parrying dagger is well suited for use against the cutting blows of a sword and the thrusts of a rapier. Its large side ring and outward curved quillons provide the back of the hand and the wrist with ample protection from an opponent's attacks.

Rapier

Italian, ca. 1570–75

Steel, traces of gilding, iron, and wood; weight: 2 lbs. 8 oz.

Rogers Fund, 1904 04.3.287

Rapier

Hilt: probably German; blade: Italian, 1575–1600

Steel, wood, and leather; weight: 3 lbs. 6 oz.

Gift of William H. Riggs, 1913 14.25.1035

The blade of this rapier is a prime example of the most developed form of the sixteenth-century cut-and-thrust rapier. It is extremely long (49 ³/₄ in.) and acutely pointed to maximize its effectiveness in thrusting, and it also has a sharp double edge, well suited for cutting.

RIGHT

Pair of Practice Swords

German, ca. 1575–1625

Steel, wood, leather, and brass;

weight: 2 lbs. 14 oz., 2 lbs. 13 oz.

Gift of William H. Riggs, 1913 14.25.1110 and .1111

Purposely made with dull edges and blunt tips, these practice swords are descendants of knightly war swords, which were made to be wielded with either one hand or two. Known simply as the long sword, this type was a specialty of the German school, which continued to practice its use long after it had been abandoned elsewhere.





OPPOSITE

Rapier and Parrying Dagger

German, ca. 1580; rapier blade, Spanish (Toledo)

Partly gilt steel, and wood;

weight: 3 lbs. 4 oz. (rapier), 11 oz. (dagger)

Bashford Dean Memorial Collection

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Robert W. de Forest, 1929 29.157.13, .14

Rapiers and parrying daggers were frequently made as sets and decorated to match. The blunt tip and dulled edges of this rapier blade indicate that it was originally made for a practice weapon. It is signed by Juan Martinez of Toledo, a royal bladesmith to King Philip II of Spain.

Rapier Carrier and Belt

German (probably Saxony), ca. 1600

Leather, silk, velvet, and metallic thread; engraved and gilt steel

Bashford Dean Memorial Collection, Funds from various

donors, 1929 29.158. 729

From the mid-sixteenth to the mid-seventeenth century the rapier was usually worn at the left side, its sheath thrust through a sling-like carrier suspended from a waist belt. A diagonal strap reached from the carrier across the front of the belt to hold the rapier at a convenient angle. Some sword belts were embroidered with designs that matched those of the wearer's clothing and perhaps even the decoration of his rapier hilt. This example, richly embroidered in stumpwork (raised designs) with silver and gold-wrapped threads, is from the armory of the dukes of Saxony, in Dresden.

Parrying Dagger and Sheath

Attributed to Daniel Sadeler

German, active Munich, 1610–32

Steel, gilt steel, leather, and wood;

weight: 14 oz.

Gift of William H. Riggs, 1913 14.25.1314

Daniel Sadeler was a renowned specialist in the chiseled and gilt decoration of iron and steel. He worked at the court of the dukes of Bavaria, succeeding his equally famous elder brother Emanuel in 1610. Working in Munich from the 1590s to the 1630s the Sadelers produced some of the most finely decorated firearms and edged weapons ever created.

BELOW

Transitional Rapier

Hilt: possibly French or Spanish; blade: Spanish (Toledo), ca. 1625–50

Steel and wood; weight: 1 lb. 8 oz.

Gift of William H. Riggs, 1913 14.25.1084

The dishlike guard, short quillons and light blade are all characteristic of the early stages of the development from rapier to smallsword.





Rapier

Hilt: probably English; blade: German (Solingen), ca. 1630-40

Steel and wood; weight: 2 lbs.

Rogers Fund, 1904 04.3.1

Rapier

Hilt: probably Dutch, ca. 1650; blade: German (Munich)

Iron and steel; grip of wood and copper (modern);

weight: 1 lb. 10 oz.

Purchase, Bashford Dean Memorial Collection, Funds from various donors, by exchange, 1995 1995.51

The skillfully chiseled iron hilt is decorated with a series of grotesque faces that look the same whether seen right side up or upside down. The simplified construction of the hilt—with a knuckle guard, single side ring, and only one quillon—reflects the need for lighter, smaller rapiers, which came into fashion in the mid-seventeenth century.



Cup-Hilted Rapier

Italian (Brescia), ca. 1650–60

Steel and wood; weight: 2 lbs. 2 oz.

Rogers Fund, 1904 04.3.2

The cup hilt was developed in Italy or Spain about 1625 and was the predominant form of rapier used in Spain and in Spanish territories until the late eighteenth century.

Parrying Dagger

Italian, ca. 1650

Steel and wood; weight: 1 lb. 8 oz.

Rogers Fund, 1904 04.3.17

This type of dagger, sometimes referred to as a *main gauche*, was used in conjunction with a cup-hilted rapier.

Carrier for a Cup-Hilted Rapier

North Italian, or Spanish, ca. 1650

Engraved steel

Gift of William H. Riggs, 1913 14.25.1242

This type of carrier was designed specifically for a cup-hilted rapier. It was clipped to the top of the rapier scabbard by a split prong. A semicircular bar above the prong adjusts to hold the rapier at a set angle. There is also an adjustable swivel beneath the buckle, which was passed through a waist belt.

Scarf Sword

Possibly French or Dutch, ca. 1650–75

Steel, gold, and wood; weight: 1 lb. 4 oz.

The Collection of Giovanni P. Morosini, Presented by his daughter Giulia, 1932 32.75.221

The scarf sword, a decorative weapon falling between the rapier and the smallsword, derives its name from the fashion of wearing it thrust through a scarf or sash, rather than hung from the more usual sword belt.

Smallsword

Dutch (?), ca. 1660

Steel and wood; weight: 1 lb. 3 oz.

Bashford Dean Memorial Collection, Funds from various donors, 1929 29.158.713

The hilt is chiseled in high relief with crowded ranks of fighting horsemen. This weapon is part of a large group of similarly decorated smallswords of unknown origin that were made possibly in Holland or France.

Dueling Rapier

Italian (Brescia), 1680–1700

Steel and wood; weight: 1 lb. 12 oz.

Rogers Fund, 1904 04.3.41

The date and the unusual length of the blade (49½ in.), which is designed only for thrusting, suggest that this rapier was intended specifically for use in duels or in exhibition bouts.

BELOW

Smallsword

English (London), hallmarked for 1747–48

Silver, steel, and wood; weight: 15 oz.

Gift of Eric Vaule in memory of his mother, Rae D. Vaule, 1991
1991.115

The smallsword could be both a deadly weapon and a stylish costume accessory for a fashionable gentleman. The silver hilt of this smallsword is decorated with an imaginative array of Rococo masks and shells. It is a fine example of the application of contemporary decorative styles to the design of sword hilts.



Bag for a Smallsword Hilt

French (Paris), ca. 1725–50

Leather and ink

Rogers Fund, 1995 1995.52

A finely made smallsword was sometimes supplied with a fitted storage bag to protect the hilt. This bag is printed with the trade card of the Parisian *fournisseur* (cutler) Guillaume Pagés (recorded 1709–57). It includes his shop sign, *Au Dauphin Royal* (At the Royal Dolphin), and the advertisement that he “makes and sells all kinds of beautiful swords in the most current styles.”

BELOW

Smallsword

Marked GS (Possibly George Shaw)

English (London), hallmarked for 1689–90; blade dated 1674

Steel and silver; weight: 1 lb. 5 oz.

Gift of Jean Jacques Reubell, in memory of his mother, Julia C. Coster, and of his wife, Adeline E. Post, both of New York City,
1926 26.145.346

This hilt displays, in an early form, the basic features that continued to characterize English and American smallswords throughout the eighteenth century.



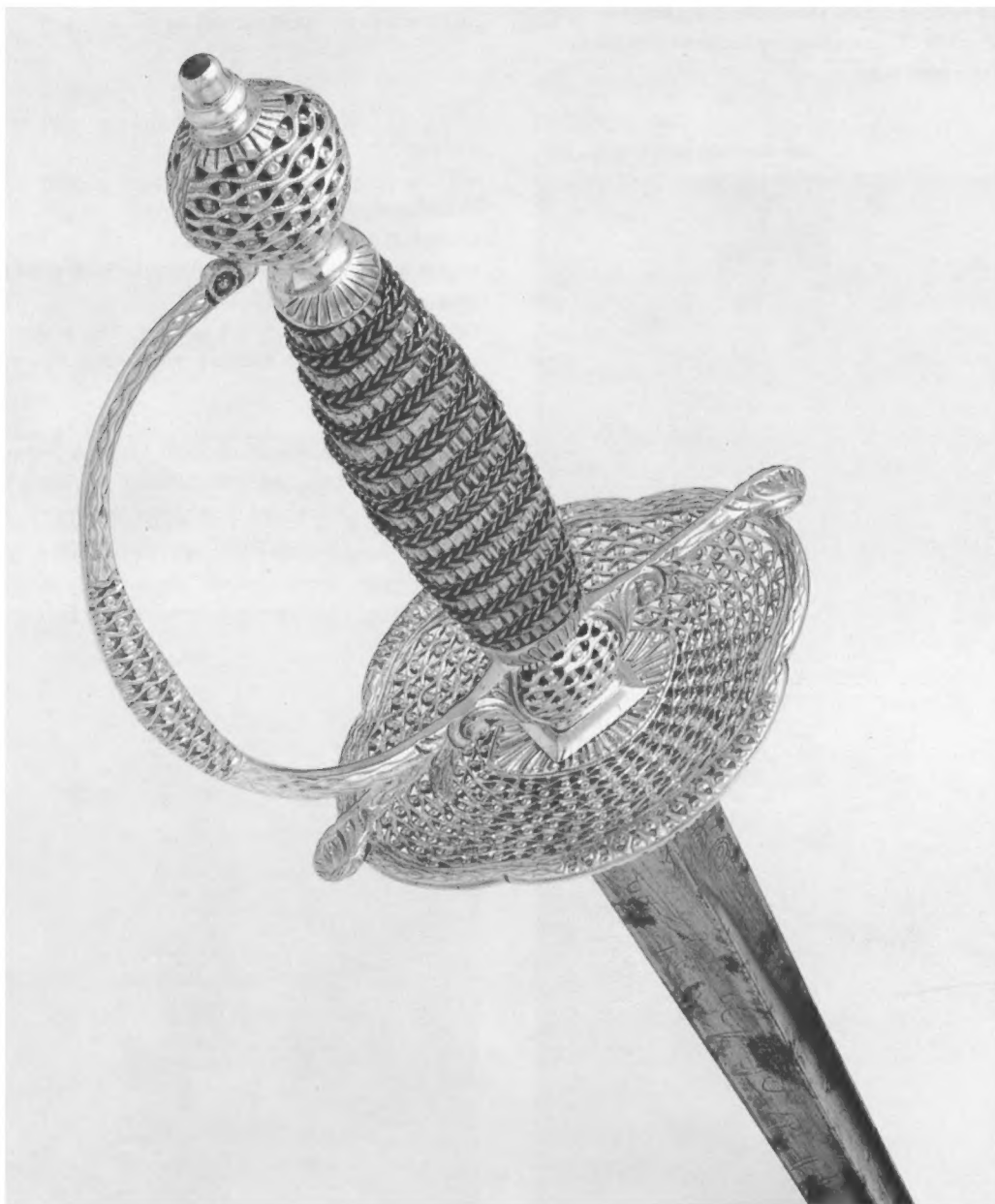
Smallsword

Marked I.R.

English (London), hallmarked for 1770–71

Silver, partly gilt, and steel; weight: 14 oz.

Rogers Fund, by exchange, 1995 1995.90





LEFT

Smallsword with Scabbard

Master GG (active Paris, ca. 1744)

French (Paris), hallmarked for 1773-74

Gold, steel, wood, and fish skin;

weight: 1 lb. 13 oz.

Purchase, Gift of William H. Riggs, by exchange and Annie

Laurie Aitken Trust Gift, 1998 1998.35ab

This is one of the finest Neoclassical French smallswords of the eighteenth century. The hilt is cast entirely of yellow and green gold and ranks with the highest quality Parisian goldsmiths' work of the period. It is modeled with figures of the classical deities Mars, Minerva, Jupiter, and Hercules, and the personifications of Justice and Prudence. This smallsword represents the final and most refined stage in the development of civilian swords, shortly before they ceased to be worn in western Europe.

Smallsword with Scabbard

French, ca. 1780-90

Partly gilt steel, silver, wood, and leather;

weight: 1 lb. 10 oz.

Gift of Jean Jacques Reubell, in memory of his mother, Julia C. Coster, and of his wife, Adeline E. Post, both of New York City, 1926 26.145.290ab

The steel hilt is chiseled in low relief with military figures in contemporary and antique costume set against a stippled and gilt background. This decorative theme is found on sword hilts from the seventeenth through the end of the eighteenth century.

Smallsword

English, ca. 1790–1800

Steel; weight: 14 oz.

Rogers Fund, 1916 I6.164

Faceted cut-steel hilts were fashionable in England during the last quarter of the eighteenth century and are still worn on ceremonial occasions at court in Great Britain. This finely made hilt exemplifies the style at its most complex and refined.



